TRANSCAUCASIA

MENSHEVISM VERSUS BOLSHEVISM

S.U. 643 Ge. 668 Georgia was for Stalin not only the homeland where his first political notions were formed, but also the scene of those of his political triumphs which had been the most difficult to achieve. The saying that a prophet has no honour in his own country applies fully to Stalin.

Stalin's attitude towards Tiflis is in many ways comparable to Hitler's attitude towards Vienna. Hitler disliked Vienna because he considered that city was not sufficiently German and too polyglot. Stalin hated Tiflis because of its petty bourgeois atmosphere and the absence of sharp class conflicts. Vienna offered no scope to Hitler and forced him to seek his luck in Germany. For Stalin, Tiflis was tantamount to failure. In Tiflis Stalin found a strongly developed Georgian nationalism preventing the unfolding of an internationalist revolutionary working-class movement such as Bolshevism wanted to be at the beginning of the century. Having recognized that Tiflis and the whole of Georgia were a rather hopeless ground for his activities Stalin left the field to the Georgian Mensheviks, a popular socialist party with deep roots in the national traditions. He went to Baku, which became the capital of the Transcaucasian revolutionary movement.

S.U. 663 Ge. 665 The day of revenge came. Just as Hitler entered Vienna as conqueror on March 12th, 1938, Stalin entered Tiflis in the middle of July 1921 not as a Georgian, but as the representative of the Moscow central power. For three years little Georgia had succeeded in keeping outside Soviet control. From the Russian October Revolution onwards until the proclamation of the Georgian Soviet Republic on February 25th, 1921, Georgia was not just a little recalcitrant Caucasus Republic, a 'Menshevik Vendée' braving Bolshevik Moscow, but the symbol of the struggle between World Bolshevism and international Social Democracy. Social Democrats of Western Europe looked with hope and almost with pride towards Georgia. The leaders of the Second International went to Tiflis and returned to their respective countries greatly impressed by the achievements of the Georgian Menshevik Government. The chief theoretician of Social Democracy, Karl Kautsky, wrote an enthusiastic book, *Georgia – a Social Democratic Peasant Republic*, and the Belgian socialist leader Emile Vandervelde contributed a preface to a book on democratic Georgia by the Menshevik, Vladimir Voytinsky. Social democrats throughout the world seemed to indulge in a secret wish that small Menshevik Georgia would make a better case for socialism than large Bolshevik Russia. Social democrats also expected Georgia to demonstrate that the relationship between peasants and workers could be solved more satisfactorily by democratic means than by establishing the Bolshevik hegemony of the city proletariat over the rural

[Cf. category 175, p. 225 -- Analyst]

population. In short, Tiflis was designated to avenge the defeat which democratic socialism had suffered in Petrograd and Moscow. Ge. 665

The liquidation by military action of Menshevik Georgia under these circumstances became a vital necessity from the point of view of the Bolshevik leaders. By establishing Soviet power in Georgia they attained several aims simultaneously. In Russia proper Bolshevik prestige was greatly enhanced by the fact that a province of the Czarist Empire had been recovered. The British Empire was embarrassed by Russia's enlargement of her access to the Middle East. More important than all this was the blow inflicted by the young Soviet State on 'World Menshevism', which led to a strengthening of the Russian grip on certain sections of the working-class of Western Europe. S.U. 648

STALIN'S FIGHT AGAINST 'NATIONAL' BOLSHEVISM

The proclamation of the Georgian Soviet Republic was a victory for Bolshevism, but, as yet, not for Stalin personally, since the original leaders of the Georgian Communist Party were hostile to Stalin and to his views on Georgia's future within the framework of the Soviet Union. Those Georgian Bolsheviks who took over the Tiflis Government after the collapse of Menshevik rule considered Stalin as a kind of renegade, because he had completely stripped himself of any Georgian national feeling and was determined to uphold against the Georgians the interests of the central power, which were ultimately Russian interests. Knowing his Georgian compatriots, Stalin feared that even the Georgian communists would strive for a measure of independence detrimental to Soviet centralism. He felt that the Georgian people with its strong historical state traditions and occupying the largest single territory of Soviet Transcaucasia needed to be more thoroughly watched than the Armenians or the Azerbaidzhani Turks. S.U. 631 643 Ge. 665

It was always Stalin who insisted on curtailing the powers of the Georgian Bolsheviks while Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders of the early period were prepared to grant them far-reaching freedom within the Soviet framework. It was also Stalin's idea to press the Georgians into a Transcaucasian Soviet Federation in order to keep them better under control. Such a Transcaucasian Federation might have been a commendable solution for a *rapprochement* between Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaidzhani Turks; it might have even become a means for creating a united front of the three peoples against Moscow centralism. Stalin's intervention, however, brought a different sort of federation into being. For Stalin, federation was no end in itself, but just a temporary instrument of Soviet policy to be cast aside after its aim had been achieved. At a time when Soviet centralism was not strong enough to rule Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaidzhanis from S.U. 631 563 Ge. 642 Ca. 631 642

[Cf. category 635, p. 226 for continuity -- Analyst]

S.U. 631 563 Ge. 642 Ca. 631 642

Moscow, the Transcaucasian Federation was an intermediate agency by which the national sovereignty of the three republics could be limited. The cabinet of the Transcaucasian S.F.S.R. included ministers for agriculture, home affairs, home trade, finance, and local industry as well as the Chairman of the Transcaucasian State Planning Commission, who was usually a Russian. The existence of the Transcaucasian Federation enabled the Russian communists generally to play the role of arbiters.

Ge. 665 [642]

The Georgian communists felt the weight of the Transcaucasian Federation more than anybody else, for the headquarters of the federal government were in Tiflis. The recognized leaders of the Georgian communists, like Budu Mdivani and Philip Makharadze, energetically opposed Stalin's federation manœuvre and wanted Georgia to become a direct member state of the U.S.S.R., which in their view should be but a loose federation. The ideal solution which they aimed at was, however, to have no Soviet Union at all, but to be linked with the Russian communists only through the Communist International.

In the early twenties the Georgian communists showed many signs of an independent policy, confirming Stalin's anxiety as to the future relationship between Georgia and the Soviet State as a whole. If Georgia could not be independent from Moscow, they wanted her to keep at least as many prerogatives of an independent State as possible. Thus they resisted Russian control over the Georgian railways and ignored the foreign trade monopoly of the Moscow Government by concluding contracts with foreign companies directly. In doing so they were in accord with the recommendation which Lenin had given to the Transcaucasian communists shortly after the formation of Soviet Georgia. This is what Lenin had advised: 'Make the utmost intense and speedy economic use of the capitalist West by means of a policy of concessions and by commercial intercourse. . . .'[22] Soviet Georgia also wanted to maintain an independent attitude in relation to the other Transcaucasian Soviet Republics and their subjects. Thus certain categories of Armenians and Azerbaidzhanis were ordered to leave the Georgian Soviet Republic so that the country might assume a more homogeneous national character. Georgian women marrying citizens of other Soviet republics lost their Georgian nationality. The central Government in Moscow declared all these discriminatory practices null and void.

Ge. [641]

Despite all appearances the Georgian communists were by no means chauvinists. They knew only too well that their régime was unpopular and that they had to maintain themselves in power by making concessions in every possible direction, including concessions to nationalist feelings. When taking over the Georgian Government in February 1921 the Bolsheviks claimed a membership of 20,000, of whom about one-half were expelled from the party almost immediately after the

21: Kolarz J-4 (no date) 1952 R1 Soviet Union R1
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establishment of Soviet rule. The Mensheviks, on the other hand, had 60,000 members on the very eve of the collapse of Georgian national independence. After Georgia's annexation by Soviet Russia the Mensheviks and other opposition forces continued to exercise considerable influence on the Georgian peasantry, whose material conditions remained unsatisfactory, and on Georgian intellectuals, who temporarily were replaced in the administration of the country by Russian communists. By 1924 half the civil servants in Georgia were of non-Georgian origin and in Tiflis, the capital, as many as 63 per cent.[23]

In view of the comparatively liberal rule of the local communists, underground activities on a mass scale were then still possible in Georgia. All non-Bolshevik groups of Georgia formed a secret coalition under Menshevik leadership and also established contact with resistance forces in the Northern Caucasus and in Azerbaidzhan. On August 27th, 1924, the long prepared rising broke out. It was probably the biggest anti-Soviet insurrection initiated by any non-Russian nationality after the end of the Civil War. The centres of the rising were the rural areas in Western Georgia and the Chiaturi manganese mines, the most vital economic asset of the country. The rising was liquidated by the Red Army within a few days. A British trade union delegation which toured the Caucasus soon afterwards and which otherwise almost entirely endorsed the official Soviet attitude remarked: 'The insurrection probably had the sympathy of a majority of Georgians and would have had their support had it succeeded. But it never had any chance of success.'[24]

About 3,000 people perished in the rising. The régime showed a comparatively mild attitude towards the organizers of the insurrection; none of them was executed after a trial which took place in the summer of 1925. Later on Soviet courts were less indulgent and passed death sentences not only on genuine rebels but also on participants in imaginary plots against the régime. The rising was nevertheless a turning point. It led to the speedy liquidation of all opposition groups and the complete consolidation of the communist one-party system in Georgia. Inside the Communist Party itself conditions remained unsatisfactory. Official Soviet sources pointed out later that members of a gang of 'enemies of the people' had penetrated into high party and state posts, particularly during 1929 to 1931.[25]

Stalin's principal antagonists in Georgia were, however, not the new converts to Bolshevism, but the old Bolsheviks around Makharadze, the President of Georgia, and Mdivani, the Vice-Premier. For a long time mutual dislike and hostility were covered up by hypocritical statements which reached a culminating point in the celebrations held in Tiflis in February 1936 on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the Georgian Soviet Republic. The Georgian leaders to whom Stalin extended his congratulations were then already marked as purge victims.

The speeches which they delivered in return in praise of Stalin could not save them. There was only one element of dignity in Soviet Georgia's noisy birthday celebrations, namely when the patriarch of Georgian communism, Makharadze, recalled the following passage from Lenin's letter to the Caucasian and Transcaucasian communists: 'The Transcaucasian communists . . . shall understand the necessity of not copying our (i.e. Russian) tactics, but of thoughtfully varying them in accordance with the difference in the concrete conditions'.

In view of his advanced age Makharadze was later spared from trial and execution. The other Georgian leaders were less fortunate. They were executed after two separate trials for 'terrorism and high treason' in the summer of 1937. The first group included Budu Mdivani and the Georgian planning chief, Toroshelidze. The second group was headed by the Georgian Prime Minister, Mgaloblishvili.

THREE GEORGIAN COMMUNISTS: ORDZHONIKIDZE, YENUKIDZE, BERIYA

By a strange coincidence a prominent Georgian member of the central Government, the Peoples Commissar for Heavy Industry, Grigory Konstantinovich Ordzhonikidze (1886-1937), a member of the Politbureau, died suddenly in his Moscow flat shortly after the arrest of the Mdivani-Torozhelidze group, which included relatives and personal friends of his. His death occurred a few hours after a meeting of the Politbureau which is believed to have discussed the Georgian situation. Ordzhonikidze had enjoyed a considerable popularity even among many non-communists. No wonder that his death provoked a large number of contradictory rumours. Although the official announcement spoke of Ordzhonikidze's natural death, people in Moscow were suspicious and believed that he had committed suicide. The régime tried to remove suspicion by a pompous state funeral and by keeping the name of the dead man in high honour. Ordzhonikidze used to be one of Stalin's few personal friends; he was known to have persistently endorsed the tough line which the secretary-general had pursued towards his Georgian compatriots. This does not exclude the possibility of suicide. The friendship between Ordzhonikidze and Stalin may have ended suddenly on account of the refusal of the former to accept the wholesale physical extermination of the Georgian communist leadership.

Only two years before Ordzhonikidze's death Stalin had broken with another close Georgian friend of his, Abel Yenukidze, who had become a danger to his policy. He had occupied the extremely influential post of the secretary-general of the Central Executive Committee (TsIK), which was, until the introduction of the new Stalin constitution, the highest Soviet institution, the body which made the laws of the U.S.S.R.

[Cf. Category 665, pp. 229-230 -- Analyst]

GEORGIANS

All decrees and laws which the Central Executive Committee passed had to bear Yenukidze's signature as well as that of Kalinin. Early in 1935 the Transcaucasian Federation approached TsIK with the request that Yenukidze should be relieved of his post so that he could become Prime Minister of the Transcaucasian federal Government. Soon afterwards, Yenukidze was indeed relieved of his post, but not to take up the high office reserved for him. He was dismissed as a punishment for alleged lack of vigilance, for having allowed untrustworthy elements to infiltrate into important positions of the TsIK apparatus. Two and a half years later Yenukidze was executed as a traitor, together with other high-ranking Soviet officials, including the Armenian-born diplomat Karakhan (1889-1937), former Soviet ambassador to Turkey and China. The Yenukidze riddle is easily solved. When Yenukidze was sacked, Stalin had already decided to scrap the Transcaucasian Federation, which was no longer necessary for the checking of local nationalism in view of the consolidation of the central state machinery. Stalin had no need for a strong personality like Yenukidze at the head of the Transcaucasian Government, who might have instilled new life into a dying body. The Federation was formally disbanded in 1936 with the introduction of the new Stalin constitution.

In the place of Ordzhonikidze and Yenukidze, another prominent Georgian penetrated into the supreme Soviet leadership and into the closest circle of Stalin's favourites. His name was Lavrenty Beriya. His principal merit was that he had carried out purges all over Transcaucasia. These had been of such importance for the strengthening of the Soviet régime as a whole that they led to his appointment to the post of all-Union Soviet police chief in December 1938.

GEORGIA'S ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL MISSION

In the inter-war period the Soviet central authorities considered Georgia primarily from the point of view of its economic usefulness. We have already referred to the manganese mines of Chiaturi. They are not the largest manganese ore deposits in the U.S.S.R., which are those of Nikopol in the Ukraine, but the Chiaturi ores contain a higher percentage of manganese and are famous for their high quality. In the early years of the Soviet régime the Chiaturi manganese played an important part in Russian foreign trade, and as late as 1931 Chiaturi covered 42 per cent of the world demand for that valuable mineral. In later years Chiaturi manganese was less used for export in view of the discovery of new manganese ore deposits in the 'capitalistic world', but Soviet industry itself relied greatly on Chiaturi's output.

Apart from boosting manganese production, the Soviet régime encouraged the increase of Georgia's oil and coal output and founded over

[Cf. category 665, pp. 230-231 — Analyst]